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ABSTRACT

The Hartford Early Childhood Program involves more than 4,500 children from 4 years old to first grade level in over 200 classrooms. Classrooms are designed to offer children an environment that encourages them to learn independently. Ideas have been borrowed from the Montessori approach and the British Infant Schools and fitted to the needs of the Hartford school district's urban students. The program philosophy embodies new approaches that can be used in old school buildings such as formal education beginning at 3 years, mixed-age "family" grouping, interest centers, and emphasis on intrinsic motivation toward personel success. Future plans call for extension of the program to all public school classes in grades K through 2. Sources of more detailed information are provided for this program, specifically, and for Model Programs Childhood Education, in general. (Author/WY)

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Model Programs

Childhood Education

Hartford Early Childhood Program

Hartford, Connecticut

An urban public school system's large-scale approach toward restructuring early childhood education

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
Elliot L. Richardson, *Secretary*
Office of Education
Terrel H. Bell, *Acting Commissioner of Education*
OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
Donald Rumsfeld, *Director*

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FOREWORD

This booklet is one of 34 in a series of promising programs on childhood education prepared for the White House Conference on Children, December 1970. The series was written under contract by the American Institutes for Research for the Office of Economic Opportunity, and the Office of Child Development and the Office of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

Within the broad area of childhood education the series includes descriptions of programs on reading and language development, the disadvantaged, preschool education, and special education. In describing a program, each booklet provides details about the purpose; the children reached; specific materials, facilities, and staff involved; and other special features such as community services, parental involvement, and finances. Sources of further information on the programs are also provided.

The public school system in Hartford, Conn., is making a massive effort to restructure the educational program to meet the needs of its children. The Hartford Early Childhood Program now involves more than 4,500 students from 4 years old to first-grade level in over 200 classrooms. The program will soon be extended to the second-grade level. Classrooms are designed to offer children an environment that encourages them to explore and learn independently. Though ideas have been borrowed from the Montessori approach and British infant schools, Hartford educators have established their own program, fitted to the needs of their urban students.

FACING THE PROBLEMS OF AN URBAN ENVIRONMENT

With a population of over 160,000, Hartford has had problems common to many American cities: racial tensions and riots, many middle-class families moving to the suburbs, decaying neighborhoods, poverty areas, and a feeling of despair in many parts of the community. These problems have also been reflected in the schools in the decreasing attendance rates, instability of the student population, vandalism, and an increasingly poor environment. Hartford educators wanted a school program that would challenge and interest each child and help him to realize his own potential.

In May 1968 a commitment was made by the Hartford Board of Education to establish a model early childhood learning center with an inviting and responsive environment. The Early Childhood Program began at Hartford's Rawson School in September 1968 with 50 children in a mixed-age group of 4- and 5-year-olds. In 1969 State and local funds were used to establish the Center as a training model so that the program could subsequently be used in five kindergartens. In 1969-70 the program was adopted for the 60 remaining kindergartens and 10 first grades, and in 1970-71 it also reached 120 first grades and 20 second grades.

THE PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY

The program was developed under the leadership of Joseph D. Randazzo, who is the director, and utilized the resources of the education departments of the University of Hartford and the University of Connecticut. It embodies the following principles of childhood education:

- Formal education should begin at age 3.
- Mixed-age, developmental "family" groupings--e.g., ages 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12--should replace grade-level designations.

- Subjects should be combined into various interest centers that are multisensory, multi-instructional, and multidisciplinary.
- Rewards should be intrinsic success goals, not letter grades or promotion.
- The primary goal should be to maintain an environment that allows each child to achieve and maintain his own "success identity."

Gone are the desks--for both children and the teacher--and the set schedule for various subjects. Replacing them are interest centers which invite students to pursue various activities and a school day that allows them to choose their own time for each activity. Activities are carefully structured to teach a specific skill, and many are manipulative and self-correcting. They may involve commercial materials but more often are based on teacher-made items. The student does many activities alone; he is responsible for his own progress but seeks assistance and direction from the teacher whenever necessary.

THE ROLES OF THE TEACHER, AIDE, AND RESOURCE TEACHER

Although the teacher's role has changed from its traditional character, she is still, of course, a vital part of the program. Among her responsibilities are observing and guiding the children, serving as a model, creating curriculum and materials as needed, and keeping student progress records. She encourages the child to direct his own activities, intervening only when necessary.

The teacher is assisted in all her tasks by a paraprofessional, or aide. The aide is a member of the school community, must have a high school diploma or its equivalent, and is hired--at a salary of approximately $4,000 per year--for full-time assistance in the classroom. A visitor to a program classroom is often unable to tell which adult is the teacher and which is the aide.

The teacher and aide are trained during special sessions and receive help from a resource teacher throughout the school year. Eight resource teachers serve the program schools, each assigned to about three schools. Except during training sessions, the resource teachers visit each of their schools weekly, observing each teacher and paraprofessional and offering assistance and suggestions. Resource teachers are selected from among those who have taught in the program. They serve as resource teachers for only 1 year and then return to their classrooms. The director feels that

this arrangement has been very effective since resource teachers know what they're talking about and do not lose touch with the classroom.

A NEW APPROACH IN OLD SCHOOLS

Because many schools participate in the program, classroom organization varies. In one school, two old classrooms and a smaller storage room have been converted into one large classroom and a small room for cleanup and "motor activity." The classroom has 54 children--ages 4, 5, and 6--with two teachers, one aide, and two student teachers. In another school, classrooms are more typical in size and shape, with about 25 students, one teacher, and one aide.

The classroom environment is built around the child, presenting a warm, welcoming quality that is the result of planning and work sessions in which administrators, teachers, and parents have cooperated to renovate many of the old, inner-city schools. The child-size furniture and the low room-divider shelves--which serve as storage space for kits, games, and manipulative materials--have, in many classrooms, been built and painted in bright colors by the teachers and the parents of students. Rooms are divided into areas corresponding to the general divisions of the students'

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learning activities--housekeeping and practical life, sensory refinement, mathematics, language, science and social studies, creative arts and music.

Long rows of desks have no place in these classrooms; instead there are cubbies for each child. Particular classroom areas, however, may contain a low table and several chairs. Bright-colored rugs help to define room areas, and usually children have their own small rugs to sit on in any part of the room. There is generally a painting area and a cleanup area with a sink. The snack table is open all day so that children may eat when they are hungry. In all areas children are responsible for putting away their own materials after using them.

TEACHERS DEVELOP MATERIALS FOR INDEPENDENT LEARNING

The classroom is a learning environment for children to enjoy and explore. Activities reflect the influence of both the British infant schools and the work of Maria Montessori. As in the British schools, children pursue self-chosen activities individually or in small groups, without a rigid time schedule. As in a Montessori classroom, there are many manipulative materials for the child to use--materials which teach a specific skill; which are

with pictures of objects and corresponding words. Such activities develop the student's reading skills without making him feel pressured toward reading.

Children work independently, but teachers and aides keep close track of their progress, offering reinforcement and special help when needed, encouraging them, but never forcing their pace. Freedom to pursue activities in a group stimulates social growth, accountability for one's own learning activities encourages responsibility, and sharing responsibility for facilities and materials develops group cooperation.

TRAINING TEACHERS AND AIDES

One of the strongest features of the program is the training provided for teachers and aides. Before entering a program classroom, all teachers and aides are required to attend a 3-week training session. One session is held during the summer, four during the school year. For the school-year sessions, the program budget includes funds to pay substitutes for the teachers attending the session; aides receive their regular salaries. For the summer training, teachers are paid the amount a substitute teacher would cost for that period, and aides get $75 per week.

The training sessions are conducted by the program director and the resource teachers. The main purpose is to have teachers and aides learn what the children *do* in the program; trainers believe that only by going through the children's activities can teachers understand how the program works and what guidance the children need. The training center classroom has all the materials and equipment that go into program classrooms. During the 3 weeks each "student" must complete a wide variety of activities. A resource teacher is in charge of each learning area and marks a checklist when the "student" has completed an activity. At the end of the 3 weeks, "students" turn in their checklists as evidence that they have completed all the activities.

The director and resource teachers report that during the training sessions the teachers and aides learn a great deal more than how to complete specific activities. For example, they learn the basic classroom rules suggested for all program classrooms, such as "Return each material to the same place and in the same condition in which you found it." Training encourages flexibility and creativity in each teacher's use of the program; her classroom will reflect the individual approach best suited to her and her students.

During training teachers and aides also make many materials which they can use in their classrooms, such as classification cards, double sandpaper letters, a color-cued chart, and a phonogram dictionary.

Training activities also help teachers and aides to develop new ideas. At one training session, participants were asked to design and make a musical instrument, telling what they had constructed and what music they would select.

Throughout the training sessions, emphasis is placed on helping teachers and aides to grow and to approach their potential. Four words are repeatedly stressed--trust, love, respect, and commitment. These words indicate the attitudes toward children and education that trainers try to instill in program personnel.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

The difference between traditional classrooms and the program classrooms is striking. As more teachers are trained in the new approach, more classrooms are transformed from self-contained rooms with children sitting at rows of desks and the teacher at the front, to multifaceted rooms with children engaged in different activities throughout the various areas and the teacher and

aide circulating to give needed assistance. Observations by teachers and visitors indicate that children in these classrooms have more opportunity for activity, independence and self-direction, cooperation, and creativity--and that they are benefiting from these experiences.

Since children are not expected to meet the same goals at the same time, standard evaluation techniques are often not applicable. Program administrators do not plan any achievement testing until the end of grade two. This does not mean, however, that teachers do not keep track of children's progress; they are concerned with it daily. Teachers are currently developing record-keeping lists for the specific skills associated with classroom activities and materials. These will enable them and their aides to evaluate each child's educational development and plan small-group activities based on student needs and interests. Staff members are considering other program objectives as well. "We want to move in the direction of evaluating things like independence and self-direction," says the program director.

Student progress in all areas is generally evaluated for parents in personal interviews with the teacher; letter grades are not used.

LOCAL FUNDS USED

The Early Childhood Program is wholly supported by funds from the Hartford School District. This financial investment reflects the strong community interest in the program. So strong is the parents' approval of the program that over 500 turned up at a meeting held to consider cuts in the budget and demanded that no reductions be made.

The total budget of the program is approximately $500,000 per year. Extensive use of teacher-made materials, plus volunteer efforts of teachers and parents, have helped to cut classroom costs. Materials and equipment to furnish a classroom cost about $900.

FUTURE PLANS

Over the next few years Hartford plans to extend the program to all public school classes in grades K through two. As teachers and aides are trained, classes in these grades will change to the new model.

Long-range plans call for complete integration of the total school program in all grades, primary and secondary.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

The Hartford Early Childhood Program is described in a 43-page booklet, *A Case for Early Learning*, by Joseph D. Randazzo, which costs $1 and is available from:

Hartford Board of Education
Publications Office
249 High Street
Hartford, Conn. 06103

For further information prior to a visit, contact:

Joseph D. Randazzo
Hartford Public Schools
249 High Street
Hartford, Conn. 06103
(203) 527-4191

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MODEL PROGRAMS--Childhood Education

This is one in a series of 34 descriptive booklets on childhood education programs prepared for the White House Conference on Children, December 1970. Following is a list of the programs and their locations:

The Day Nursery Assn. of Cleveland, Ohio
Neighborhood House Child Care Services, Seattle, Wash.
Behavior Analysis Model of a Follow Through Program, Oraibi, Ariz.
Cross-Cultural Family Center, San Francisco, Calif.
NRO Migrant Child Development Center, Pasco, Wash.
Bilingual Early Childhood Program, San Antonio, Tex.
Santa Monica Children's Centers, Calif.
Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction, Salt Lake City, Utah
Dubnoff School for Educational Therapy, North Hollywood, Calif.
Demonstration Nursery Center for Infants and Toddlers, Greensboro, N.C.
Responsive Environment Model of a Follow Through Program, Goldsboro, N.C.
Center for Early Development and Education, Little Rock, Ark.
DOVACK, Monticello, Fla.
Perceptual Development Center Program, Natchez, Miss.
Appalachia Preschool Education Program, Charleston, W. Va.
Foster Grandparent Program, Nashville, Tenn.
Hartford Early Childhood Program, Conn.
Philadelphia Teacher Center, Pa.
Cognitively Oriented Curriculum, Ypsilanti, Mich.
Mothers' Training Program, Urbana, Ill.
The Micro-Social Preschool Learning System, Vineland, N.J.
Project PLAN, Parkersburg, W. Va.
Interdependent Learner Model of a Follow Through Program, New York, N.Y.
San Jose Police Youth Protection Unit, Calif.
Model Observation Kindergarten, Amherst, Mass.
Boston Public Schools Learning Laboratories, Mass.
Martin Luther King Family Center, Chicago, Ill.
Behavior Principles Structural Model of a Follow Through Program, Dayton, Ohio
University of Hawaii Preschool Language Curriculum, Honolulu, Hawaii
Springfield Avenue Community School, Newark, N.J.
Corrective Reading Program, Wichita, Kans.
New Schools Exchange, Santa Barbara, Calif.
Tacoma Public Schools Early Childhood Program, Wash.
Community Cooperative Nursery School, Menlo Park, Calif.